

Risque

Stories



Fiction by
Sam Walser
Lin Carter
Duane Rimel

Poetry by
Robert E. Howard - Clark Ashton Smith

RISQUE STORIES

March 1984

Number One

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Editorial

A special favorite among pulp magazine fans is the "spicy" magazine, a type of pulp that offered all the familiar varieties of pulp fiction (detective, horror, adventure, etc.) but with a special flare: a mildly titillating sexuality that seems naive and even corny by modern standards. Pulp fiction fanciers enjoy these stories with a kind of post-critical relish that half enters into the spirit of the thing, and half chuckles at it. It is in this spirit of pulp nostalgia that we invite you to re-live the good old days in the pages of this first issue of *Risqué Stories*, a revival of and a tribute to the spicy magazines of yesteryear.

Leading off the issue is Sam Walser's "She-Cats of Samarkand." Many readers will recognize Sam Walser's name from several tales in *Spicy Adventure Stories* such as "Purple Heart of Erlik," "Desert Blood," and "Murderer's Grog." Of course, "Sam Walser" was Robert E. Howard, writing under an ancestor's name. All these stories have recently been collected in the Ace Books volume, *The She Devil*. This time "Sam Walser" stands for Howard himself plus two posthumous collaborators, Marc A. Cerasini and Charles Hoffman, who have produced the present story from a detailed outline left unfinished by Howard. The outline itself appears elsewhere in the magazine, but we suggest you read it only after reading "She-Cats of Samarkand." By the way, please keep in mind that the spelling and punctuation of the story are typically Howard and have been

reproduced for authenticity's sake.

Surely the most prominent successor to the spicy tradition in today's fantasy field is Lin Carter's warrior maiden Tara, who made her appearance in the 1979 Zebra Books volume *Tara of the Twilight*. So what could be more appropriate for a spicy magazine of the 80's than a new tale of Tara? Tara's latest erotic-exotic adventure is "For the Blood Is the Life."

Duane Rimel is a veteran of the pulps, having contributed to *Weird Tales*, *Jungle Stories*, *Future Fiction*, and *Detective and Murder Mysteries*. Since the pulp era he has written quite a few spicy adventure and mystery paperbacks. We are pleased to be able to offer a new spicy science fiction story by Rimel, "June, 4683."

For those who'd like to know more about the sexy tradition in pulpdom, we present pulp scholar Will Murray's informative "An Informal History of the Spicy Pulps."

You'll also find four previously unpublished erotic poems, three by Robert E. Howard, and one by Clark Ashton Smith. We think these balance the stories nicely and believe you'll enjoy them.

A final word: those who are leery about the stereotyping often found in sex-oriented literature will be pleased to see the variety of sex roles occupied by our characters. We hope your social conscience won't bother you too much as you enjoy the first sizzling issue of *Risqué Stories*.

—ROBERT M. PRICE

She-Cats of Samarkand

by Sam Walser

1. "Dance, Yasheena, Dance!"

"The Prince of the Gypsies is no more!"

Whispered words through painted lips that froze the heart of John Gorman. He felt the short hairs on the back of his neck bristle and his grip tightened involuntarily on the wooden kumiss cup he clenched in his scarred fist. Gorman sat in a hash-eesh den in the oldest quarter of Samarkand, that ancient crossroads of Central Asia that in ages gone by had known the tread of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and Tamarlane. The city teemed with men of a dozen races and tribes; rich and poor, pampered Eastern potentates and desperate, desert-hardened nomads. All who came here sooner or later sought diversion in the more disreputable sectors, congregating, albeit warily, in dimly lit dives to dice, smoke the sacred hasheesh, fondle nubile flesh, and quaff the Prophet-forbidden wine.

In one such dive Gorman the American had waited for hours, his brain afire with the kumiss he had been drinking moodily. Surrounding him were the dregs of the East; the local Uzbeks predominated, but there were ragged Kurds, hawk-faced Arabs, and furtive Jews. It was here that he was to meet the unknown party he had been instructed to await. Now he knew his wait was over.

Gorman, like all around him, had gazed hotly on the shimmering form of Yasheena the dancing-girl, who swayed and undulated provocatively to the accompaniment of throbbing drums and maddening desert flutes. Tall and perfectly formed she was, at once lithe and voluptuous. She spun about the room like a desert whirlwind on long, shapely legs. A short beaded skirt molded itself to her rounded

hips and a diaphanous wisp of gossamer did little to conceal the heavy fullness of her swaying breasts. Her ivory skin, green cat-like eyes, and cascading billows of flaming red hair marked her as a Eurasian. She had bent low before Gorman, ostensibly to display her magnificent bosom to the *feringhi's* burning gaze. As she brushed his sun-bronzed face with her hair she hissed the message into his ear. Then she straightened and danced away once more, but not before coyly turning her head and tossing her hair over one shoulder to reveal a distinctive golden earring—the earring that had once adorned the Prince of the Gypsies.

As Yasheena danced away, fading like a mirage into the clouds of pungent hasheesh smoke, Gorman thought of the circumstances that had brought him to Samarkand and involved him in this intrigue. He had known the Prince of the Gypsies of old as a man who could obtain the unobtainable, the greatest thief of the East. Suitably bribed, he had procured for Gorman a very incriminating letter addressed to certain parties in Moscow. The letter was from Abdullah Khan, a Persian. Gorman knew the letter was authentic and that it could spell doom for his employers. He realized that Abdullah Khan was now aware of the theft, and that the Khan's henchmen must already be on his trail. He grinned mirthlessly as the threat of impending peril quickened his pulse and danced with the kumiss in his brain.

Just then, the music swelled to a crescendo as Yasheena was hefted by rugged hands atop a table in the center of the room, where she writhed, flailing her supple limbs in mad abandon. Sweat slicked her thighs, beaded on her breasts, and curled her

hair into red ringlets. The room reverberated with the rhythmic slamming of a hundred cups on rough-hewn wooden tables and the exhortation in a dozen tongues: "Dance, Yasheena, dance!"

The frenzied clamor of the barbaric crowd faded behind John Gorman as he slipped unnoticed past a heavy Turkish tapestry and through a portal that led to the back rooms of the café. He found himself in a darkened corridor lined with curtained doorways through which came the hushed sounds of secret intrigues and passionate liaisons. Gorman traversed the passageway a dozen steps before coming upon an unoccupied chamber. As he parted the heavy curtains, his keen nostrils detected on them a trace of the perfume that had scented Yasheena's hair.

Entering warily, Gorman noted that the room was sparsely furnished, at least by the standards of the East. Thick rugs covered the floor. The walls here hung with Persian tapestries illustrating a variety of erotic poses and techniques. The figures depicted danced as though lent life and movement by the weird, unsteady light cast by the sputtering flames of several brass oil lamps suspended from the low ceiling. A wisp of blue smoke curled from an incense burner set atop a small octagonal table, filling the chamber with the subtle, exotic fragrance of sandalwood. In the room's center sat a large couch, piled high with furs and silken pillows.

After ascertaining that the lewd wall-hangings concealed no hidden passages, Gorman positioned himself by the curtained entrance, standing stock-still, awaiting the return of the room's occupant who was even then finishing her dance. Presently he heard the soft pad of small, naked feet coming toward him down the hallway. As Yasheena crossed the threshold, Gorman caught a delicate, hot scent distinct from that of the incense. Instantly, the American seiz-

ed her in his corded arms, slipped a calloused hand over her mouth and dragged her to the center of the room. The dancing-girl did not struggle, but molded her pliant form against his hard body in surrender, and Gorman could feel the heat of her body even through his rough traveling garments.

Surprized by her lack of resistance, Gorman released the girl and stepped back. Yasheena, sensing uncertainty in the American, tossed her wild hair contemptuously and stared challengingly into Gorman's eyes, legs braced wide apart, hands on hips, her gaze burning into his. Gorman grudgingly admitted to himself that she was magnificent. Still overheated from her frenzied dance, she exuded a musky aroma that caused his head to spin and made him realize that it had been months since he had possessed a woman. He felt a sudden longing for her that was like a knife twisting in his vitals. He steeled himself, fighting down the tide of lust rising within him, and grated harshly, "Who the hell are you and what's going on here?"

"I am the one you were to meet," she said, nonplussed.

"The hell you are," he replied instantly, "and what happened to the Prince?"

For a moment, a hint of panic crossed her Eurasian features, then, with a shake of her supple body, she regained her composure. Her face revealed no malice as she entreated, "Please, I am so frightened. I . . . I know only that I was to speak to a black-haired *feringhi* who would come to the café tonight. He was to give me a parcel which others would come to retrieve later. That is all."

"That's all, eh?" he retorted, then, "Say, what about my safe passage to India? With the Prince dead, I'll be buzzard-bait if any of the Khan's men get the drop on me."

"I know nothing of that, but you can wait here with me until tomorrow, when my contact returns."

"I'll be dead long before that, if

I stay," he said grimly, almost to himself.

"You can leave the parcel with me; I will pass it on and lead your enemies away from you," she pleaded.

Gorman started. "No," he replied quickly, "the letter is my insurance; if Abdullah Khan's men get me, maybe I can bargain with them—my life for the letter. If not, there are plenty of others who might be interested in its contents."

"What is this letter, and why is it so important?" Yasheena delicately probed. "Do you have it on you?"

"No." Hearing the last words, Gorman became immediately suspicious. If the girl was part of a trap, her knowing he had hidden the letter in the lining of his cartridge belt would be his undoing. If she were an innocent, the less she knew, the better. Gorman continued, "The letter is safe in . . . other hands. I've got to get out now, and I think I know a way!"

"Where will you go?" she asked.

"To Herat, to the rest house on the Zaibar road. I have a friend there who can help me get out with my skin intact and get the information to the people who need it!"

"Must you leave so soon?" Yasheena murmured, running her small hands over Gorman's broad chest and caressing his rough cheek. Her question snapped the American out of his private reverie.

"No," he answered, "I'd best wait until later, before dawn perhaps." His face was burning where her hand had touched.

Yasheena smiled triumphantly, knowing full well why the *feringhi* lingered, even at the peril of his life. "Let me . . . help you," she said in a hushed, sensuous breath. "Sit, rest . . . you are weary." She indicated the soft couch with a subtle swaying motion of her rounded hips.

The room blurred to Gorman as he rasped throatily, "Yes, must rest. . . ." The dancing-girl was guiding him to the waiting couch when Gorman

abruptly seized her in his massive arms, crushing her to him hungrily and bruising her panting lips and white throat with his burning kisses. She moaned quietly as his groping hands roamed freely over her, stripping away her scanty garments to expose breathtaking expanses of quivering ivory flesh. He swept her up effortlessly, and she clung to him in naked supplication as he strode toward the fleecy mounds of silken cushions. . . .

2. Alley of Assassins

With the scent of Yasheena's heady perfume still in his nostrils, Gorman stepped from the back door of the café into the crisp desert night. He was in a narrow cul-de-sac surrounded by two and three storey buildings, their dusty brown walls muted in the moonlight. Turning, he cautiously crept down the dark alley that led to the marketplace, which at this late hour was all but deserted. As he proceeded, he mused over his next course of action. Gorman wondered if it would be wise to go back to the inn where he had stayed the night before. The whole time he had lingered there, he had felt he was being watched. The death of the Prince confirmed the truth of his presumption. Still, he mused, he had better risk returning to the drab quarters to retrieve his single piece of luggage with its extra ammunition. It was then that he heard the distinctive whisper of a knife sliding from its sheath.

He halted, squinting into the darkness. At the mouth of the alley a patch of blackness detached itself from the shadows ahead. Two similar shapes emerged into the moonlight and Gorman found his way blocked by three desert-hardened nomads. Each was clad in a desert *kafish* and ragged *abba*, and all were armed; two held the wicked curved knives of the wastes, the third clutched a large cudgel used to drive camels. Noise-

lessly they circled the white man. A merciless grin spread across the cruel face of the Arab nearest him.

Gorman knew this was no simple robbery. These men were trained killers, Arabs in the employ of Abdullah Khan, who had probably stalked him since he first came to Samarkand. He realized, too, that any cry for help would be ignored in this part of town, yet he was reluctant to use the flap holster at his side—the report would surely bring the city watch, and an official inquiry would serve no one's purpose now.

Gorman weighed his alternatives. Then, like a cornered panther, he struck. He hurled his huge bulk onto the Arab nearest him, his fingers closing like a steel trap on his assailant's bearded throat. Together they crashed heavily to the stone street in a writhing heap. As they hit, Gorman drove the nomad's head into the hard pavement and heard a satisfying crunch. He slammed the assassin's head against the stones twice more before he winced with the punishing impact of a heavy blow aimed at his kidneys. Gorman thrust aside the now-limp form of his first kill and half turned on the ground, narrowly avoiding a second blow from the cudgel. The American kicked out, and the man with the club grunted as Gorman's foot connected, breaking his kneecap. The Arab barked a curse in Bedouin as he, too, pitched to the street.

In a flash, Gorman was atop the wounded Arab, who tried vainly to bring his cudgel into play. The club, useless at such close quarters, soon dropped from the Arab's clutching grasp as Gorman rained blows on the downed assassin's face, throat, and chest. While the third nomad stood uncertainly above the two combatants, hesitating to strike lest he wound his companion, Gorman's sledge-like fists mauled the terrified Bedouin's face into a bloody paste. The Bedouin succumbed to the American's fighting prowess in seconds, gasping out his last breath

as blood thinned by saliva carried splinters of broken teeth from his gasping mouth.

As he finished the Arab with a vicious backhand blow, Gorman struggled to his feet, only to discover that the last attacker had lost his taste for blood and was fleeing into the main thoroughfare of the ancient city. The killing lust still upon him, Gorman drew his revolver before checking himself. He could not shoot for fear the noise would bring the city watch, yet he knew he should not let the Arab escape. His lower back aching with the effort, he limped as fast as he was able to the opening of the alley and emerged onto the main street. The assassin had vanished as quickly as he had appeared.

Gorman took stock of himself. He was bruised and bloodied, but not seriously injured. He knew he could not return to the inn now. After a moment's thought, he decided that his best course of action would be to proceed directly to the Krasnovodsk-Tashkent railway. Hopefully he could catch the next train out of Samarkand.

John Gorman started abruptly awake, jolted from his fitful slumber by a lurch of the antiquated train and a disturbing dream vision which, upon awakening, he could not remember. He stared out of the window at the monotonous scenery rushing past. As he did, he thought back over the events of the past several days and the circumstances which had led him to this crowded train.

It seemed years since General Kolchak convinced the American adventurer to aid the Muslims in their struggle for independence from the hegemonistic Russians. Uzbekistan had languished for centuries under one unenlightened Czar after another, all of whom excluded the Muslims from the rule of their own country. Worst of all was the Soviet government which had so recently come to power, bringing with it inefficiency, corruption, cruelty, and stupidity. Finally the

people rebelled, the students at the *medresehs* rioted, the Khans allied behind a new provisional Muslim government, and General Kolchak was placed in charge of a fledgling army, made up of many tribes and peoples all united by the grim fanaticism of their rigorous and demanding faith.

Yet there were threats to this new-found government, both from without and within, as Gorman was to discover. He had been sent to Samarkand on a diplomatic mission of sorts, an attempt to convince some of the western Khans with whom he was familiar to join the rebellion. One such khan warned Gorman that not all of Kolchak's friends could be trusted. He further suggested that Gorman speak to a certain Ayatollah about the loyalty of one Abdullah Khan, ostensibly a Persian engineer who was assisting the new government in their reorganization.

After his clandestine meeting with the Ayatollah, Gorman knew that Abdullah Khan was in fact a Red sympathizer; a European using a false identity. It was then that Gorman employed his old friend, the Prince, to obtain proof of Abdullah Khan's treachery to present to Kolchak. That proof, which had cost the Prince his life, was the letter Gorman now carried concealed on his person. It was addressed to a key operative of a radical faction in Moscow that was officially disavowed by the Soviet government, but unofficially worked to further its ends. In it, the mystery man known as Abdullah Khan detailed his efforts in Kabul to initiate raids across the Afghan border into British India. This would embroil the Amir in a struggle with the British, and it was hoped that he would turn to the Russians for support. Such an alliance would enable the Red Army to smash Kolchak's forces, in addition to undermining the British empire's hold on India.

Now a hunted man, Gorman realized that his only hope was to get the letter to Kolchak. He feared that the wily Abdullah Khan, whom Kolchak

still considered a loyal and valuable ally, might have already convinced the General that the American could not be trusted. Gorman bitterly cursed the fates that had made of him an expendable pawn to be used and discarded. Kolchak had manipulated him, just as Abdullah must even now be manipulating the general. The mysterious Khan had Gorman on the run, with every hand raised against him. Most galling of all, however, was the most recent indignity he had been subjected to. This was at the skillful hands of Yasheena during the previous evening's erotic interlude. Gorman recalled how, once ensnared on the Eurasian's couch, she had toyed with him, cat-like, time and again bringing him to the brink of ultimate ecstasy only to let him drift back once more before finally granting him release. Somehow the sinful pleasure derived from the dancing-girl's deft lovemaking left the American feeling soiled and exploited.

Gorman counted as his one stroke of good fortune his timely arrival at the depot shortly after dispatching the Arab assassins. Had he missed the train south, he would have had to wait three days for the next train to Merv. As it was, he would be in Merv by nightfall; had he been stranded in Samarkand, the gutter-rats would even now be feasting on his headless corpse.

3. *The Peacock King*

At length the clattering locomotive pulled wearily into the tiny station at Merv. So far as Gorman could tell, he had not been followed. But since he had a three-hour wait before the train proceeded across the Afghan border to Kushk, he deemed it wise not to linger overlong at the station. The Prince had once spoken of a hotel located a few blocks from the depot; he had taken refuge there on a number of occasions for it was the only place in Merv where no questions were asked. It was called *Mel-*

ek Taus—the Peacock King—after the Vezidi devil, and had been a refuge for fugitives and outcasts for centuries.

Gorman had little trouble finding it. An immense edifice of timeworn masonry, its windowless expanse loomed stark against the star-strewn desert night. It was older by far than the oldest of the structures that surrounded it, and had been built and rebuilt a score of times by diverse hands, each leaving some lingering vestige. As Gorman approached, he noted here a Roman arch, there a Persian turret, elsewhere the foreboding walls of a medieval prison. Stepping through the crumbling gateway of a structure that loomed as if it had served as a watchtower in ages past, he crossed an empty courtyard to a massive iron-bound door set in the middle of the main building's dark bulk. He found it ajar, and pushed firmly. The door swung open easily on well-oiled hinges, despite its great weight.

He was not challenged as he passed the threshold, and his footsteps echoed loudly upon entering the lobby, which was a large open area, the ceiling high above. Most of the cavernous chamber was shrouded in darkness; the only illumination came from braziers set in the walls. The sound of voices speaking in the Karluk dialect reverberated ahead of him. He noted a desk in one corner, a huge affair of dark wood and stained, dull brass. Behind it, a man in a threadbare European suit dozed, a half-empty bottle of cheap wine lying on its side before him. There were high-backed chairs and some small tables scattered about, lost in the room's immensity. Doorways led from the main room, and over one of them was a crudely scrawled sign in Arabic, Russian Cyrillic, and French: *Café*. Gorman crossed to the entrance and thrust the heavy curtains aside.

Like the rest of the hotel, the café was almost empty, the few patrons sitting at low tables in groups of two and three. An array of can-

dles flickered on a large brass fixture standing in the center of the small room, shedding a wan, yellowish light. One or two of the "guests" gave the white man a desultory glance, then returned to their uncongenial drinking. Two hardened Uzbeks seemed not to notice the American at all, but sat hunched over cups of *kumiss*.

Gorman took a seat near the door, where he could keep an eye on the entrance, and ordered coffee from the small Kurd who approached him. He removed his travel-worn coat and hung it over the back of his chair, the better to keep his Colt unentangled.

As Gorman awaited his drink, his gaze was drawn to the far corner of the room where he was startled to behold a breathtakingly beautiful young woman seated alone, her olive skin and raven tresses muted in the soft candlelight. Gorman was astounded to come across such a woman in this dismal place; the more when he noted that she wore—not the traditional veil—but a smartly tailored European traveling suit, belted at the waist, and such accoutrements as silk stockings, fashionable French high heels, and a pair of demure white gloves. Nor did he fail to notice her divinely molded form, and how the glorious swell of her proud bosom and the satisfying fullness of her rounded hips were constrained by the sharp lines of her suit. Dark, almond-shaped eyes and full, sensuous lips were framed by foamy masses of jet-black hair that surrounded her face like angry storm clouds. She was at once exotic and yet somehow strangely familiar, almost as if Gorman had seen her before, at some dim, long-forgotten place or time.

Her dark eyes seemed to beckon to him and her red lips parted as if to issue a silent summons. Intrigued, Gorman rose, determined to confront the strange woman and learn the secret of her enigmatic gaze. He crossed the room and stood before the girl, looking down at her. As he was about to speak, a look of alarm spread across her face and Gorman noted a

flicker of movement reflected in her widening eyes. He whirled to face the two scowling Uzbeks he had noticed earlier. They had risen from their cups and stood challengingly before Gorman.

The tableau held for a second, then the room exploded. One of the Uzbeks made a motion to draw the curved Damascus sword tucked in his belt, and Gorman lashed out with a crippling kick to the groin. The girl sprang to her feet and shrank back at bay, her lovely face contorted in a snarl that bared her even white teeth. As the first Uzbek pitched to the floor, groaning, Gorman jammed his foot down hard on the instep of the second to hold the rogue in place as he dove in close to slam three short, brutal jabs to the body, followed by a crashing right to the jaw that sent his opponent reeling back. The first attacker was already rising unsteadily, and had managed to draw the keen-edged sword. It was then that the girl saw an opening and dashed between Gorman and his foes. As she ran for the door, she tipped over the brass candle fixture which crashed to the floor and plunged the room into darkness. Gorman ducked a swipe of the deadly sword as the light faded, and hooked a right into his assailant's unguarded midriff. He felt his fist sink wrist-deep into the man's soft belly. Retching, the Uzbek folded with the impact.

Shifting on the balls of his feet, Gorman backed away in the darkness. Instinct guided him to his table where he groped about for his coat. His foot brushed against it on the floor; the girl had knocked it from the chair in her headlong flight. Hearing only groans from the center of the darkened room, Gorman slipped the coat on and emerged into the hotel lobby. He looked about expectantly. Of the girl there was no sign.

Two hours later, Gorman lurked on a steep grade in the foothills outside of Merv. He had dared not re-

turn to the depot after the encounter with the strange woman and the Uzbeks. Instead, he had hurried into the desert night on foot, following the railroad tracks which ran along the muddy banks of the Murgab River. Crouching behind a boulder, Gorman checked his coat pockets, desperate to know if the woman had taken anything in her retreat. He feared that she was another strand of the web weaved to trap him. His cursory search found nothing amiss; his wallet and money had not been disturbed. Satisfied, he awaited the passing of his train to Kushk. Unable to board at the station, Gorman was forced to rely on the skills he had acquired as a youth in the Southwest, when he rode the rails in search of work.

Off in the distance, the lights of Merv winked and shimmered in the cooling atmosphere. The vast expanse of the desert was silent. Presently he heard the lonely whistle of the train as it approached, chugging slowly up the steep incline. As it lumbered past, Gorman sprinted after it, grabbed a handhold, and hoisted himself deftly aboard. He was seated before the conductor entered his compartment. He gave the taciturn Uzbek his ticket, and, after determining that the train carried none of his hunters, he slouched down wearily and fell into a dreamless sleep.

4. *Perilous Encounters*

Three days after fleeing Merv, Gorman was on horseback riding to the fort at Kara-Tappeh on the Afghan frontier. His passage by rail across the Afghan border into Kushk had occurred without further incident. Once there, Gorman hired a horse and rode for the frontier. He realized now that he had been betrayed, that Abdullah Khan's agents had been one step ahead of him from the start. Possibly they had captured the dancing-girl Yasheena and forced her to talk. Gorman knew he had been mistaken to so carelessly divulge his

plan to the girl. The way to Herat must surely be barred to him by this time. He knew his best move now would be to throw himself on the mercy of the authorities in Afghanistan. He hoped he could trade his knowledge of Abdullah Khan's part in the recent border raids, and the proof he carried in his cartridge belt, for safe passage into British territory.

So at length, covered with dust and horse spume, Gorman reined in his weary steed at the wooden gate of the fort at Kara-Tappeh. Before he could even hail the guard, the gate creaked open. The American spurred his horse through the dark portal. The greeting he received, however, was not what he had expected. A dozen men, in the red uniforms of the Afghan border watch, trained their Enfields on the dazed adventurer. As Gorman slowly raised his hands, two Afghans ran up and snatched the reins from his faltering grasp. Another soldier quickly pulled Gorman's Colt from its holster and proffered the weapon to his commander, an arrogant, sharp-faced man with a cruel countenance, who examined it briefly and then tucked it into his belt. The commandant looked into Gorman's sun-bronzed face, smiled coolly, and demanded in perfect English, "Passport."

Gorman fumbled in his coat pocket, then, with a sinking feeling, realized that his passport was gone. He had forgotten about it in his hurried search after the attack at Merv. Gorman glared down at the hateful smirk of triumph that split the commandant's face.

"Welcome to Kara-Tappeh, white dog! Dismount at once and come with me." The officer turned his back on the fuming Gorman and marched crisply along. Grimly, the American obeyed. He was led into a dark office, sparsely furnished in the manner of a frontier outpost. A ceiling fan feebly stirred the hot, dry air. His captor motioned him to a chair, and Gorman sat. The commandant took a seat behind his desk and, still smi-

ling, set the American's gun on the desk before him.

After dismissing all but one of the Afghan guards, the commandant spoke once more. "Mr. John Gorman . . . do not bother to deny that you are John Gorman; your description was wired to us yesterday. We were warned that you were armed and dangerous. You are a wanted man, Mr. Gorman. A murderer, they say. . . ."

"That's a lie!" Gorman objected. "Contact General Kolchak. He'll vouch for me."

"The order to detain you came from General Kolchak," the officer intoned solemnly.

The American cursed. He knew his goose was cooked. Either Abdullah Khan had convinced Kolchak that Gorman was his enemy, or the order had come, not from the general, but from Abdullah Khan himself. Gorman changed tactics. "Listen," he began, "I. . . ."

"I am not interested in your tiresome explanations," the commandant interrupted. "A squad of soldiers is on the way from Uzbekistan to place you under arrest."

Gorman seethed helplessly. He realized that the men coming to arrest him were probably not Uzbeks at all, but Russian agents in league with Abdullah Khan. He felt cold sweat run down his broad back and wanted to shout with rage. Grinding his teeth together, he slammed his fist on the desk. "Damn!" he spat. "Are you a traitor, too?"

The commandant seemed to be amused by Gorman's discomfort. Grinning as if at some great jest, the Afghani queried, "Traitor? What is that, Mr. Gorman? Is any man a traitor when he acts on his own behalf?"

Suddenly, Gorman understood the doubts that had been gnawing at him these last few days. He recalled how he had admired General Kolchak and the revolutionaries he led. Some of their fervor had touched him, and he had almost envied them the way they could throw themselves so completely into a cause, any cause. Gorman had

never known such fervor; always had he stood apart from men. He had lived so long alone that he lived more within himself than without. Had he been more pragmatic, more honest with himself, he would have grasped what others about him had known instinctively—that the revolution was doomed to failure, that the high ideals he had risked his life for were as chaff in the wind, to be scattered and trampled underfoot.

Gorman's broad shoulders sagged as if some great weight had been laid upon them.

The commandant seemed to understand the change that had come so abruptly over his prisoner, yet goaded him further: "Foolish American, come to adventure among an ancient people. You blunder into matters you do not comprehend, you make much noise—you are like a child disturbing its elders. Yet you and your countrymen think you rule the world. One day an Eastern hand will smite you down and put you in your place forever. Did I mention that your fellow spy, the reporter Steve Corcoran, has also been captured, and is being held at Herat?"

Gorman felt an icy hand close on his vitals; it was Corcoran whom he had planned to pass the letter on to. However, if the commandant had expected to see further outward signs of Gorman's distress, he was disappointed. Gorman had regained his iron self-control, and the germ of a plan was growing in his brain.

The commandant became annoyed by Gorman's sullen silence, and spoke sharply: "Western dog! Before I turn you over to your jailers, I think I shall see you grovel before a son of the East."

"More like the bastard son of a Cossack regiment," Gorman retorted.

Enraged, the commandant snatched the Colt from the desk in front of him and, its metal weighting his fist, leaned across the desk to strike Gorman a vicious blow to the temple. Gorman pitched to the floor,

upsetting his chair. He convulsed for a few seconds and lay still.

The hulking Afghani guard stepped forward and bent over the prostrate form of the American. As he leaned close, Gorman exploded into violent action. He drove the big knuckles of his fist into the Afghan's throat, crushing his Adam's apple. The man staggered back, choking, as Gorman sprang to his feet and tore the Enfield from the stunned guard's grasp. Gorman rammed the rifle's butt squarely into the soldier's face, mashing the Afghan's hook nose into a blackish smear of blood, gristle, and broken flesh. A loud crack accompanied the impact and the Afghan dropped like a puppet bereft of strings to lie motionless, his mangled head lolling on a broken neck.

The commandant saw only a blinding blur of motion and, before he could react, found himself staring down the barrel of the Enfield now held by Gorman.

"One peep out of you," the American warned, "and I'll blow your brains out the back of your skull."

The commandant meekly surrendered Gorman's pistol and, moments later, lay unconscious beside the dead soldier, a blue welt spreading where Gorman had slugged him. Gorman dismissed the notion that the noise made during the struggle would bring soldiers to investigate; any passing nearby would merely assume the sounds of blows to be those of a spirited interrogation session. Peering into the corridor outside the office, Gorman saw no one and slipped quietly out.

Dust clogged his nostrils and burned in his throat as Gorman beat the flanks of the horse he had commandeered from the fort at Kara-Tapeh. He had been riding hard for hours now, ever since he had blasted his way through the open gate of the compound and into the desert expanse once more. Before knocking him out, Gorman had forced the commandant to

reveal where he kept his personal mount, a magnificent Arabian stallion, quartered behind the compound. It was a simple matter for Gorman to slip unnoticed into the private stable, fit the animal with the silver-inlaid saddle which hung on a nearby rack, and make good his escape. A discerning judge of horse-flesh, Gorman noted that the other mounts could never hope to overtake the fine racing steed he rode. But the American, leaving nothing to chance, threw open the gate to the main stable as he departed, and fired the Enfield he carried into the air. The mounts of the common soldiery stampeded into the courtyard. The Afghans, dulled from months of inactivity along the peaceful border, were thrown into confusion. Gorman dashed through the front gates of the fort before the dazed guards could close it. He left one guard who tried to stop him face down in the sand, a bullet in his brain.

Now, once more, John Gorman rode to Herat. He cared not that a trap awaited him there, or that he would probably die. He cared only that his friend and fellow countryman, Steve Corcoran, was held captive, bait to lure Gorman to Herat. Well, he mused fatalistically, he was coming, to deal death and perhaps to die. It was all the same to Gorman now.

In these past days he had faced mazes upon mazes of intrigues and deceptions. He grew frustrated by the uncertainty, soul-sick of being the quarry, the hunted one. Now he would become the hunter. In his heart Gorman longed for a physical enemy he could smite, a foe of flesh he could lash out at. He vowed that any who got in his way would pay, that there would be no quarter asked, and none given.

He burned now with the berserker rage of his Celtic ancestors. Veils of confusion and doubt lifted from him. His iron will was fixed on a single purpose—to confront his foes squarely, to kill or be killed.

Turning southwest at a crossroads, Gorman headed for the small Arab settlement at Chodchal Molal robot. He had decided to meet his enemies prepared. At the settlement, he could obtain a fresh mount and more ammunition with no questions asked. Little love was lost between the Afghani authorities and the Wasuli Bedouins at the settlement. His theft of the horse would inspire only admiration among those venerable horse thieves. Though Abdullah Khan had put a price on the American's head, Gorman doubted that any of the Wasulis knew of it; they kept pretty much to themselves and little cared for what went on outside of their small environs.

Gorman reckoned that he could trade his bone-weary steed and the fine silver-studded saddle for less distinctive ones, some ammunition for his weapons, and a night's lodging at the tiny rest house. As the sun was setting, he reined in before the rest house and dismounted stiffly. A young Arab boy took his steed into the stable while Gorman splashed well water on his travel-stained face. He readied himself for a bargaining session with the innkeeper, and hoped it would not take long. He was hungry and exhausted, and longed for rest.

Gorman still felt edgy the following day despite having slept through the night and much of the morning. Rage yet smoldered within him, and he was eager to face his enemies. His bargaining with the innkeeper had gained him a fresh horse, a cheap saddle, cartridges for the Enfield, and twenty rounds of ammunition for his Colt. He used the last of his gold to buy a room and frugal meal from the innkeeper. Now it was past noon and Gorman stood alone in the stable adjoining the rest house, saddling his new mount. He had almost finished when the familiar click of a pistol hammer being pulled back snapped him from his private reverie. Gorman turned toward the sound and found himself face-to-face with the

girl he had seen in Merv!

She stepped closer to him, not uttering a word, her pistol leveled at his heart. She wore the same outfit, minus jacket and gloves, that he had seen her in at the Peacock King. Her features stirred the same sense of haunting familiarity that had troubled him in Merv. "What the hell is this?" Gorman demanded.

She spoke, her curiously accented voice melodious despite a note of tension. "You are the American, John Gorman?"

"Well, what of it?" was his gruff reply.

"I think I must kill you, Mr. Gorman," she remarked coldly.

Gorman said nothing. His own pistol was holstered in the cartridge belt, on the other side of the stable. He was unarmed. Though she was close to him, he could not move fast enough to knock the gun from her hand before she filled him with lead. The pistol she held was a cumbersome antique, and her dainty finger looked

barely strong enough to squeeze the trigger, yet a grim determination lit her eyes.

"Who are you?" Gorman asked, stalling for time, waiting for an opening.

"I am Zoraida."

"Why do you want to kill me?"

"You killed my father!"

The sudden vehemence in her voice startled him. He looked her levelly in the eyes and said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

At that point a tear crept from the corner of her eye and the gun wavered slightly in her hand. Gorman struck.

Instantly he closed the gap between them, knocking the gun spinning from her grasp. She stepped back, surprised by his sudden attack. Gorman did not hesitate to press his advantage. Locking his iron fingers in the bodice of her garment, he pulled. The front of her blouse ripped away like tissue, baring the twin mounds of her superbly shaped breasts. Two more swipes of his massive paws

shredded the remnants of her clothing into rags that fell away like autumn leaves.

Zoraida tottered backwards almost to the stable wall and stood poised precariously on her high heels. Her dancer's legs were sheathed in black silk stockings supported by a satin garter belt; save for these she wore no undergarments. Yet she did not cower or make the typical feminine motions to conceal her nudity. She faced Gorman with her head thrown contemptuously back; dark eyes flashing, proud bosom heaving, nostrils flaring like a young mare's.

"I'll teach you to play fast and loose with me, you she-cat!" he growled. He cuffed her sharply with a curt backhand blow that caused her to reel drunkenly and fall to one knee. Then his fingers twisted in the thick black locks of her hair and he hauled her to her feet once more. Grabbing her narrow shoulders, he shook her resoundingly like a small child until he noticed the way in which a trickle of blood from the corner of her mouth reddened her full lips.

With an inhuman bleat of frustration, confused anger and freshly roused passion, John Gorman fell upon the girl Zoraida and bore her down onto an ageless bed of dung and dust. . . .

5. Catfight at Herat

In the days that followed, it seemed as if the land itself had risen up against the intruder. An hour after Gorman had set out from Chodchah Molal robat, a cobra mysteriously appeared on the trail in front of his horse, which bolted and threw him. After shooting the serpent, he was incensed to discover the splintered stock of the Enfield where it had fallen under the horse's stamping hooves. Later that day, one of the region's terrible wind storms, the *afganets*, roared down from the moun-

tains and caught Gorman on a flat plain with no real cover. He pulled his mount down behind a low outcropping of rock, scant protection from the lashing wind and blasting sands. The storm blew into early evening, burying him and his horse beneath an ocean of sand. The winds did not diminish as the day waned, but grew colder. The chill blast bit through his travel-worn garments, the sand choked him, and he clung to his mount for warmth and protection. The wind made it impossible to build a fire, to eat or drink; even breathing became difficult at times. Gorman wept in helpless fury, the tears running rivulets down his sand-caked cheeks. At length he fell exhausted into sleep.

The following morning the wind departed as suddenly as it had come. Gorman rose to find that his water skin had leaked its precious contents into the arid earth. The American mounted and rode on. He did not quench his thirst until later that evening, at an oasis where he camped. There, despite the campfire he built, a panther ignored its natural instincts and sprang to attack his horse, tethered not three yards from the blaze. Gorman shot the predator through the heart twice, expending more cartridges. The rest of the night passed without mishap, but the next morning, as he rode out of the copse of palm trees that surrounded the waterhole, a bullet grazed his side. The horse reared as Gorman dived for a gully. Two bandits lay in wait for the *feringhi*, whose fire they had noticed the night before. He left them both dead in the sand after a fierce gun battle that depleted all but seven of his remaining bullets. On the corpses he looted he found no ammunition, but from one he took a keen curved tulwar. As he rode away from the oasis, he saw the vultures gather.

Night had fallen once more by the time the rest house on the Zaibar



Road came into sight. In the faint starlight of the moonless night, it appeared as a black bulk etched against the shimmering outline of the town of Herat on the horizon. Gorman approached cautiously, his keen senses alert despite the hardship of recent days. The Colt was out of its holster, its worn butt clutched in Gorman's sweating palm, and the notched tulwar hung at his side. He leaned forward in the saddle, his eyes straining to pierce the darkness. The night was still and silent.

Gorman's nerves jumped as he heard the triumphant shout of ambushers rising from their hiding places. Three ragged Uzbeks sprang from the drainage ditches that ran parallel to the ancient road and raised their rifles. Another Uzbek ran from behind a palm tree and attempted to grasp the reins of Gorman's horse. Even as the mount reared back in alarm, Gorman fired. The Uzbek grunted and pitched headlong. Apparently, he and his comrades had been instructed to take the American alive if possible, rather than simply blowing him off his saddle from their place of concealment. Gorman reined his horse around in a semi-circle, pumping bullets into the others. He spurred the steed this way and that to present a constantly shifting target difficult to draw a bead on. Another Uzbek charged, tulwar raised, from the shadows. Gorman blasted his face into a red ruin with his last bullet. He had not missed once; six Uzbeks now lay face down on the road. Still more came.

Gorman drew his own tulwar and dug his heels into his horse's flanks. With an incoherent roar, he charged. The nearest Uzbek shrank back, but not fast enough. The Easterner tried, too late, to block the descending tulwar with his rifle. His head leapt from his shoulders in a fountain of blood and bounced on the Zaibar Road. The Uzbeks were firing now, their fusillade deafening the American. Gorman hugged close to his

horse's neck and shifted in the saddle to split the skull of another foe. Then he felt the horse under him lurch with the impact of several bullets. As it crashed headlong into the road, Gorman was hurled from the saddle. He felt himself falling, and at the last instant tried to throw himself to one side. He hit the ground with numbing force, then he knew no more. . . .

A dull throbbing at his temples brought John Gorman from a swirling red haze back to painful consciousness. He tried to shake his head clear, but the movement brought with it a blinding agony. Attempting to move, Gorman found himself bound upright, his hands behind him, tied to a square support beam by strong hemp. He was in a cellar, probably the basement of the rest home. Torches flared murkily, casting wavering shadows across a low ceiling and a floor of hard-packed earth. In front of him, against one wall, were some empty water barrels and a supply of wood for making additional casks. Leaning against one of the finished barrels were a large pair of metal shears and some thin strips of iron. His field of vision was narrow, yet, craning his neck to one side, he gasped to see Steve Corcoran, bound and hanging limply from another support beam. Gorman noted with relief that, although unconscious, Corcoran was breathing regularly. There was no one else in the damp cellar.

Gorman tried to snap his bonds, but the rope was too stout. Undaunted, the American began to run the rope along the sharp edges of the square post. The cords stood out on his bull neck with the effort of moving the rope up and down. He was bound tightly, and by an expert, but his patience was rewarded by a slight fraying of the rope. Feeling the slack, he increased his efforts.

He froze suddenly when he heard the clack of hobnail boots tramping down a flight of stairs out of his

range of vision. Another, heavier, pair of footsteps followed, and Gorman strained to see who was approaching. He burned with anticipation, for he felt that now, at long last, he was about to confront the mastermind behind his present predicament, Abdullah Khan himself!

The truth, however, was not as Gorman imagined it, for when the first figure came into view, he was dumbfounded to behold, not the wily Persian, but the woman he had last seen sprawled naked in lewd abandon on a couch in Samarkand. Yet no longer was she Yasheena the dancing-girl; she wore no make-up now, her red hair was arranged in a nondescript manner, and she was clothed in the uniform of the Russian Red Guard.

She strode arrogantly towards him, a mountainous Uzbek obediently in tow. Gorman noted insignia denoting high rank, the black gloss of her knee-high patent leather boots, the wide belt drawn tight about her slim waist, and how the severe lines of her uniform could but slightly obscure the lush contours of her voluptuous figure. She held a slender riding crop which she tapped menacingly in the palm of her hand as she stood regarding Gorman.

"So, American, you are awake," she said. "I knew that hard head of yours could take punishment, but still I feared I might lose you before our tender reunion."

"You bitch," Gorman grated, "I would never have guessed."

"Of course not, you fool!" The last word was almost shouted as the woman launched into a tirade. "You thought me just Yasheena, a silly little dancing-girl who would just naturally fall into the arms of a big, strong American adventurer. Little did you in your masculine conceit ever dream that that soft plaything could in reality be Colonel Olga Pedachenko of the Red Guard!" She emphasized the last word by striking the riding crop against her palm, then continued. "You stupid

swine. I thought you worked for the British, or perhaps the Amir. Had I known you were working for that fool Kolchak, I would never have let you soil me with your filthy touch."

Gorman was still working at the ropes as imperceptibly as he could. The Russian woman, completely engrossed in her own ranting, seemed not to notice.

"It was I who dogged your track since you fled Samarkand," quoth she. "I underestimated your physical prowess by having only three men await you in the alley. Again, at Merv, two men were not enough . . . but at least I foiled your attempt to meet up with Zoraida, the Prince's daughter."

The Prince's daughter! Gorman shrank with shame and self-loathing as he realized why the mystery woman looked so hauntingly familiar each time he met her. He now remembered the Prince once mentioning a daughter whom he had sent away to school in Europe. Zoraida was only seeking her father's murderer when she confronted Gorman. And he had behaved like a hell! Gorman vowed that if he escaped this trap, he would find the lovely young gypsy and make it all up to her. But first he would revenge himself on the cruel Russian hellion whom he now realized was the one who had killed the Prince, his friend. Gorman was jolted back to the present as Olga Pedachenko thrust the end of the riding crop under his chin and forced him to meet her gaze.

"Your Jihad, your Holy War, is over, John Gorman," gloated the Russian. "The forces under your precious General Kolchak were smashed at Tashkent by the Red Army. The Soviet Union rules Uzbekistan once more." Gorman's heart sank . . . so it was over, he thought. The Prince dead, his daughter's life ruined. All for naught.

Gorman strained noticeably at the ropes that bound him; he longed to smash the woman's gloating face. "I'll kill you," he roared in help-

less frustration, "you slut. . . ." The crack of the riding crop striking Gorman's cheek echoed in the confines of the cellar. The American winced at the pain, his cheek burning where the leather had creased it.

The Russian tossed her head back and purred, "Soon I must leave for Kabul to rejoin my lover, the man you know as Abdullah Khan. In truth, he was a key member of the Party even before the fool Czar was toppled from his throne. But first, since the memory of your touch is as an affront to me, I shall deal with you in a manner befitting your crime." Olga Pedachenko smiled with gleeful malice. "You seem to cherish these Muslim savages; you fought to keep them in power, da? You understand their harsh laws, I trust? Punishment is simple. When the law is broken, they remove the offending part. The hand of a thief, the eyes of a spy . . . you have offended me with your love-making, John Gorman, and I shall remove your offending parts!"

Gorman blanched as the savage Russian turned to her Uzbek guard, gesturing with the riding crop at the metal shears Gorman had noticed earlier. Turning back to Gorman, she mocked him, "A cur like you does not deserve to die as a man. But rest assured I shall give a full account of your fate to my lover. I am certain it will add fire to his passion."

As the Uzbek approached with the shears, the room was rocked by the report of a pistol fired from the darkened stairway. A bullet crashed into the Uzbek's skull, felling him like an ox. Hope surged in Gorman, and Olga Pedachenko snarled pantherishly as a woman stepped from the shadows. It was Zoraida, clutching a smoking pistol and clad now like a true daughter of the Romani, with a flowing gypsy skirt and colorful blouse that clung to her ample bosom. She glared hatefully at the Russian who stood her ground and haughtily returned an icy stare.

"Well done, little tramp," Peda-

chenko snapped. "You so bravely face me with a loaded pistol."

Zoraida snarled and spat, "I don't need a gun to deal with filth like you." Gorman groaned as Zoraida flung the weapon from her, yet felt a twinge of admiration watching the gypsy advance, hair in windswept disarray, breasts heaving with the intensity of her emotion, eyes flashing thunderbolts of sheer hate at her foe. She was every inch a woman of the wastes, a wild, barbaric thing. The Russian smiled triumphantly and said, "Now, you dark-eyed sow, come and die as your father did."

With a piercing yell like that of a maddened panther, Zoraida hurled herself at the other woman, who gave back before her enraged onslaught. Recovering her balance, the redhead fended off the raking talons groping for her eyes. She clawed back, shredding the gypsy's filmy garments and scratching the tender skin laid bare while her own heavy uniform afforded her more adequate protection. The riding crop whistled through the air raining merciless blows on Zoraida, driving her back. The gypsy's face contorted, evidencing a rage that crowded out any fear. She blocked the blows with her forearm and renewed her attack. Gorman had seldom been witness to such a display of elemental fury, even in his violent life.

Blood trickling from a cut on Zoraida's face reached her lips, and the taste of it intensified her wrath. From a silken sash that girded her waist she plucked a curved, keen-edged dagger. Olga snarled and spat venomously, then lashed out with the riding crop. The gypsy stepped lithely aside, deftly throwing the Russian off balance. The redhead quickly regained her footing, but not before the dagger ripped through the front of her uniform, opening it from neck to waist. Her breasts bobbed free as she struck back with a well-placed kick to the gypsy's midriff that sent Zoraida tumbling to the floor. Peda-

chenko stripped off the torn tunic that now encumbered her shoulders and upper arm. With her statuesque body nude from the waist up, the heavy fullness and pale, pink-tipped beauty of her huge breasts looked obscene on the cold hard frame of the Russian officer.

The respite lasted but a moment. Zoraida sprang to her feet, casting away the tattered remains of her garments to face her enemy all but naked. She lunged at the Russian, her hand snaking out to grasp the arm that swung the riding crop even as Olga clutched the gypsy's arm arcing upward with the dagger. They strove to hold each other's weapons at bay, well-toned muscles rippling smoothly under naked flesh that glistened with a light sheen of sweat. Long minutes crawled by as the two women grappled in a deadly, loveless embrace, the bare breasts of each pressed flat against those of the other.

Finally, Zoraida tightened her grip on the Russian's wrist and twisted until she was rewarded with a resounding snap of breaking bone. The riding crop fell from twitching fingers and, face whitened by pain, the Russian woman released her hold and stepped back. Zoraida did not relent; she raised the dagger as Pedachenko, feeling her doom upon her, lifted her broken arm to fend off the blow. The keen edge of the dagger opened a ragged gash along the useless arm and Olga gasped as the blood splashed her naked breasts and rained down on her belly, the drops sparkling there like rubies.

The flashing dagger bit into the redhead's flesh again and again. The Russian whimpered, helplessly flailing her arms, bleeding profusely. With a cry of hate and triumph, Zoraida raised the dagger high as the Russian looked entreatingly into the gypsy girl's face. But there was no mercy there, only bitter loathing, and the knife plunged. The point sank between the twin globes of Olga Pedachenko's heavy breasts, piercing

her cruel heart. With a groan, she dropped to the floor, convulsed once, then died.

John Gorman, with one mighty heave of his massive shoulders, parted the last strands of the hemp that bound him, tearing free just as the knife sank home. Instantly he was across the room, holding the now weak form of the gypsy girl, raining kisses on her upturned face. She clutched him tightly and repeated the words, "I love you, I love you."

Gorman held the girl, soothing her as she told him how she had sensed the truth of his assertion that he did not kill her father, and of her perilous journey in search of him. Gorman's rough caress was what she had longed for, what she had wanted all the time she had been in the polite society of Europe. At heart she was a wild woman of the wastes, a gypsy, who wished only to be dominated by her mate, and she knew with the unerring instinct of her sex that Gorman was the man for her.

After a few minutes, Gorman disengaged himself from the arms of his love and untied Steve Corcoran, who had remained unconscious throughout the entire drama. As Zoraida fashioned a crude garment for herself out of a piece of burlap, Gorman shook his friend awake. When intelligence filled Corcoran's eyes, he recognized Gorman and knew that he, too, was safe.

"Gorman!" he cried. "You made it. Thank God! I was waiting for you when a dancing-girl told me she had a message from you. It was a trick! But I see we both got out of it okay. I've been holding safe passage to India for you and I can arrange it for your friend as well. The Mid-East may be too hot for us now, but the rest of the world is waiting!"

Gorman happily embraced his little gypsy princess, smiling down into her glowing countenance and thinking of the wonderful days—and nights—to come.

Strange Passion

by Robert E. Howard

Ah, I know black queens whose passions blaze
Alike for girls and slender boys.
I've known a girl with lust-curved lips,
A black Swahili, snatch in glee
Her trade-cloth dress above her hips
And for a flogging order me.

And as her bare sleek rump I fanned
She writhed before me on the earth
And shrieked, yet I could understand
Her shrieks were ecstasies and mirth.

For I know women and the length
They go to passion's trumpet skirl.
And I have felt the speed and strength
Of a slim-limbed Somali girl.

Naked, beneath the ju-ju trees
What time my passion hottest burned,
I lay across her slim, brown knees,
My firm young buttocks bare upturned.

Each time she shook in passion's hap
With greater strength she gripped and held,
Stretched me stark naked o'er her lap
And beat me till I fairly yelled.

And I have known a Congo queen
Of beauty tinged with tiger-claw,
No joy from sexual sin could glean
Unless at least a thousand saw.

At that I halted—not for long!
She rose up, nude, with flashing eyes,
Unbreached me there before the throng
And jerked me down between her thighs.

And I have known a queen who shared,
A Niger dame, each brave the right.
Their privy members she compared
For a companion for each night.

"For the Blood is the Life"

by Lin Carter

The bushes parted and a young girl, stepped cautiously into the clearing and peered about alertly, searching with every sense for danger. These, the Yuthog Woods, were reputedly the haunt of the most terrible predators—ghouls being the least dreaded.

The girl was young, no more than sixteen, and ill-equipped for this savage wilderness. She was tall for her age, and slim, with long coltish legs and strong arms, well-muscled as those of a boy. But she was no boy, not with those ripe, firm, pointed breasts and warmly curved hips and thighs. Her eyes were large, tip-tilted, green as emeralds between their thick fringe of sooty lashes; her mouth full, soft, lush and sweet, her face heart-shaped, with a small snub nose sprinkled with toast-brown freckles, her long hair crimson as sunset flames.

She was as naked as a babe, save for the soft leather buskins which shod her small feet. And her only weapon was a long, leaf-shaped dagger which she clenched in one fist. It was made from an alloy of silver wedded with steel, and etched along its length were strong protective runes—strange and alien sigils, cut into the curious metal by needles of adamant dipped in the slobber of Gorgons.

It was her only weapon in all this savage wild. She had found it atop the bared sarcophagus of a half-uncovered tomb the night before. Something about the odd metal or the weird signs drawn down the blade had affrighted the ghoul-pack who had excavated the tomb. So she had taken it up, as much for hopes that it would similarly repel whatever ghosts or demons haunted the Woods of Yuthog as for the reason that she had no weapon, and felt more comfortable when armed.

She was a War Maid, one of the questing Starhonna.

Her name was Tara.

She had become separated from her companions in peril due to the hazards of the road. These parts of the strange, shadowy world called Twilight were unknown to her, so she went cautiously. In a world devoid of sun, moon or stars, all directions seemed alike to the Starhonna, but she went forward bravely, trusting to Those who guided her on her virgin quest as a War Maid.

From the edges of the glade where she stood, the woods sloped away into a swampy place of tufted hummocks of dry, withered grass which lifted from sodden pools of rancid mud and brackish water. The girl stepped carefully, testing every place of footing with a dry branch snatched from the brush. And then she encountered a marvel, of sorts.

Sunken to her chin in a patch of quicksand, a woman looked pleadingly, but without words, into her eyes. The woman's bare arms were spread on the surface of the yellow mud to give her body greater buoyancy and to prolong the slow, sucking death to which she was doomed. But there was nothing solid within the reach of those long, slender but sinewy arms for her to cling to. And she did not speak because the quicksand was level with her chin: to have opened her mouth would have been to swallow down a gulp of the stinking, yellow mud.

Tara did not hesitate, but flung herself prone and inched on her bare belly until her pointed breasts sank into the surface of the pool, while she reached out with both strong hands to grasp the helpless woman by the throat. Her toes wriggling for some purchase in the lank, withered grass, the War Maid held the woman's

head above the mud and slim muscles knotted and writhed as she sought to drag the other from the dreadful embrace of the sucking doom which had her in its deadly clutches.

Within a few moments, she had drawn the woman's torso out of the yellow mud; now her forearms hugged the woman just below her naked breasts, which were full and succulent and which weighed warmly against Tara's bare skin. The nipples, she noticed, were distended and erectile, as if impending doom were somehow a cause for erotic arousal.

It took Tara the better part of an hour to drag the naked woman out of the quicksand and upon the dry grass, where at length both lay, panting and trembling from the exertion.

"I have . . . no strength left," the woman sighed faintly. "But if you can help me . . . my house lies not far off—in that direction," she said, indicating the location with a nod. Tara helped the stranger to her feet and bearing more than half the weight, began to stagger and stumble in the direction of the house . . . although it occurred to the young girl to wonder for what cause anyone would choose this ill-reputed place for their dwelling. Surely, only witches or ghouls would care to dwell in the dreadful proximity of these dire and haunted woods, or this death-dealing swampland.

The house was long and low, builded of logs chinked with dried clay, with a thatched roof that frowned above small, dim, blind windows like a scowling brow. The door was unlatched. Tara half carried and half dragged the woman within, lay her on the rug before the grate, touched dry tinder to warming flame, and soaked cloths found in a chest in ewers of fresh water to sponge her body clean of the vile mud.

It was lean and long-legged, that body, leaner and more fleshless than Tara's succulence. When cleaned and dried, the woman's body shone white as bleached bone, in curious contrast

to Tara's own rosy creaminess. The woman's face was strong, long-jawed, with jutting cheekbones, the full lips scarlet as a raw wound, the eyes deep black but filled with restless glints of fire-red. Her long, slick hair was black and lusterless. Her breasts were hard and rubbery and pointed, her loins lean, with narrow hips.

The woman lay quietly, listlessly, while Tara ministered to her; but from time to time her black and restless eyes strayed to the ripe curves and tender flesh of the girl's naked body, and she licked full lips with a dry and furtive tongue. She said nothing. When Tara had finished, and had wrapped the bare, dry body in warm woolen robes, the woman nodded to a chest.

"There is wine and cheese and bread for you," she said hoarsely. "As for myself, I require nothing, for I have but recently . . . fed."

The emphasis she placed on the last word was odd, but Tara thought little of it. She satisfied her hunger and thirst, then curled up next to the woman who lay asleep by now before the crackling flames. Wolves—or werewolves—howled in the distance; fingers of clammy mist coiled and seethed against the grimy panes; thin, sour rain battered upon the thatched roof.

But Tara slept.

It was near "Lambence" when she woke, that gradual brightening of the skies which was the nearest that those who dwelt in Twilight ever knew to day. Someone had lifted her into the bed and drawn soft covers over her: obviously, the woman she had rescued from the clutch of the quicksand. Indeed, she awoke to find the naked woman standing near and gazing at her half-bared beauty with desireful eyes, where she had pushed the covers down in her sleep.

Tara stretched, yawned. "Is it Lambence, then? I must have slept . . . how do you feel?" The tall woman shrugged.

"I have recovered my strength,"



she said in her deep, throaty voice. "My name is Morhalla, by the way; the quicksand caught me unawares when I strayed from my homeward path during the Dimming." By this word she meant the dark. Tara named herself. The woman gestured.

"There is wine and fruit and dried meat on the table," she said. "As for myself, I desire nothing." Tara rose and performed her ablutions and ate; all the while, the strange woman—Morhalla—watched her with an unblinking gaze.

All that day, Tara assisted her hostess. She gathered tubers and spice-bulbs from the neglected fields and water from the stream for a stew, into which she also put the remainder of the meat. The woman seemed to keep no domestic beasts or fowl and Tara wondered upon what she fed. That night they shared the last of the wine, but Morhalla declined to share the one bed with her guest, claiming urgent business. She stalked from the house, leaving Tara to stretch and drowse and stare sleepily into the leaping flames upon the grate.

Somewhile later, Tara suddenly awoke to find Morhalla seated upon the bed, her cold, long-fingered hands sliding over the girl's bare body beneath the coverlet.

"So warm, so soft, so full of life," the woman murmured, half to herself, fingers curling about the girl's ripe breasts, eyes gleaming redly black and hungry in the faint glow of dying embers. Her purring voice, as it were, cast a spell over Tara, who did not resist or stir as those grave-cold hands crept between her thighs to caress and probe. But then, as the burning eyes came closer and the woman thrust the covers back, the bared knife was disclosed, flashing like silver flame in the dim light, every weird sigil luminous as if in warning. With a shrill cry, Morhalla recoiled, shielding her eyes. She rose, whirled, and suddenly was

gone through the door.

And Tara, with an inward shrinking, knew what she truly was: an *uigoi*—a swamp vampire. She lay the cold blade between her breasts and strove to stay awake, but it eventuated that sleep claimed her.

When she woke with Lambence, Morhalla was again standing by the bed, lean and hungry. It seemed that her night-prowlings had resulted in no provender, for she was more gaunt than before, her thin, strong features wasted, eyes febrile. She fingered the coverlet with restless fingers, yearning to thrust it back yet fearing the cold blade of welded steel and silver.

"You are an *uigoi*, are you not?" Tara demanded.

"Let me drink from the fat vein that throbs in your neck," the gaunt woman begged in a dry whisper. "You will know no pain, only a delicious lassitude, a voluptuous yielding . . . I will not drink freely . . . I must make you last . . . only a little every night. . . ."

Tara whipped forth the blade and bared it; Morhalla flinched away with a wailing cry. "You saved my life! You are responsible for it!" she cried harshly, plaintively. "Help me—I cannot feed as you do, from the wholesome things of the earth—I must have blood to survive, for in the blood is the life!"

Shaken with disgust and revulsion, Tara refused. At length, Morhalla slunk from the house to prowl the swamp and the evil woods beyond, returning hours later unsatisfied and even hungrier. She watched avidly from the width of the room as Tara ate the last of the bread and cheese and finished the stew that she had made.

"Pity me," she moaned; "I waste for lack of rich, hot blood; I cannot live without it!" Then she burst into a horrible kind of weeping, dry-eyed and tearless, her thin shoulders shaking. Tara took her in her arms and comforted her as best she could.

She helped Morhalla to the bed. "Sleep a little, rest, conserve your strength," she urged. Morhalla, obediently, stretched out, but found no rest until Tara's hands, stroking lean thighs and fondling the firm, pointed breasts, strayed at last between her feverish thighs and plied and fingered therebetween with a knowing skill. The vampire woman climaxed with a sharp, husky cry, tensed all over, then sank into a sleep-like languor that was not quite slumber, and seemed somehow appeased.

Tara rolled herself into a blanket and sought her own rest before the hearth, which she had piled high with dry wood from the forest. The two passed a troubled night and Tara woke with Lambence to find the woman crouched beside her, fingering her warm throat where one great artery thudded with the pulses of her heart.

"Only a little, just a few drops," Morhalla moaned between dry lips parched and feverish. "I will make you last, oh, very long . . . ?" But Tara shrank from her and brandished the bright blade between them like a stout shield.

Later that day, after Tara had fed, with watchful eyes ever wary of the vampire's sudden spring, watching the naked woman prowl the bare cabin like a caged beast, she sought the bed herself and composed herself for slumber. The woman seated herself on the edge of the bed and caressed Tara's luscious body with tentative fingers while the War Maid clenched the magic knife, hidden under the coverlet but ready to be flashed forth at need. She permitted Morhalla to lay bare her body and to stroke and fondle as she would; the long fingers of the other at last

dipped into the rosy lips that lay between her thighs, which parted half-willingly. They probed and played within as the girl tossed and turned, moaning with pleasure.

"I will comfort you even as you comforted me," whispered the swamp vampire huskily. Then she stiffened, and withdrew long fingers suddenly from the inmost recesses of Tara's girlhood. They were dabbled with rich scarlet.

"So that is what it was," murmured the War Maid. "All day have I felt aches and pains and heaviness of head . . . but it is only my monthly courses, not swamp fever as I feared." The woman stared at the pink-lipped slit between Tara's naked thighs.

"If you will not let me drink the life-blood from your throat," she said hoarsely, "then let me drink from that other blood which your woman's body rejects. . . ."

And she leaned forward, to lick and lap, thin-boned face buried between the lax and parted thighs. Tara lay back, swooning with delight as the agile and tireless tongue—hot and rough as that of a cat—explored her innermost being. Time and again, the clever tongue brought her to an explosion of ecstasy such as she had never known. At length, licking wet lips, the vampire withdrew, replete and flushed with new vigor, to curl up before the fire like a well-fed kitten.

Tara stretched and yawned and composed herself for exhausted slumber. Before she drifted off to sleep, however, she reminded herself drowsily that within three or four days she must find a snug haven elsewhere. For once her monthly flow had ended, Morhalla would again be lean and famished, and begging for the fat vein that pulsed in her throat.

Lesbia

by Robert E. Howard

From whence this grim desire?
What was the wine in my blood?
What raced through my veins like fire
And beat at my brain like a flood?

Bare is the desert's dust,
Deep is the emerald sea—
Barer my deathless lust,
Deeper the hunger of me.

Goddess I sit and brood—
They cringe to my Hell-lit eyes,
The wretched women nude
I have gripped between my thighs.

As they writhed between my hands
And the ocean heard their screams
Firing my passion's brands
As I dreamed my lurid dreams.

Their breath came fast and hot,
Their tresses were Hades' mesh;
World and the worlds were not;
Flesh against pulsing flesh.

Their white limbs fluttered and tossed,
They whimpered beneath my grasp
And their maidenhood was lost
In strange unnatural clasp.

Hours my pleasure beguiled
The green Arcadian glades,
As idle mornings I whiled
With free-hipped country maids.

Under the star-gemmed skies
That looked upon curious scenes
I have spread the round white thighs
Of naked and frightened queens.

What was it turned my face
From brown-limbed Grecian boys,
Weary of their embrace
To darker and barer joys?

A miser weary of coins
I wearied of early charms,
Of youths who ungirt my loins,
Restless sighed in their arms.

With many a youth I lay,
But their wine to me was dregs.
I found scant joy in they
Who parted my supple legs.

I turned to the loves I prize;
Found joy amid perfumed curls,
In a maiden's amorous sighs,
In the tears of naked girls.

These are the wine of delight—
A girl's ungirdled charms,
A woman's laugh in the night
As she lies in my eager arms.

Goddess I sit and laugh,
Nude as the scornful moon—
World and the worlds are chaff.
Say, shall my day be soon?



June, 4683

by Duane Rimel

The view from his Male Section 1 window was much more interesting than the one from Section 2. Here he could see the non-breeders working in the fields, and through the bars of his opened window hear snatches of song when the guards were not around. The tunes were very old, obviously pre-Mother I. Eastward rose a snow-covered mountain partially sheathed in mist. The nearer slopes were green and inviting.

The door of his cubicle opened, his morning food was brought in by a Caste VI server, light in the hips as were most of the sterile helpers.

She placed the food on his repast table. The tray carried his name card, Olan 9.

"Are you prepared for breeding?"

"Yes. What do they call you?"

A hesitant smile. "Senus Eleven."

"Pretty." Be kind to the servers.

"Save that for your meeting."

He moved from the window and sat in front of the table. He was hungry. Senus left the room, he heard the familiar snap of the lock, and he began to eat. The food was tasty and of much better quality than before. His promotion to Section 1 had certain advantages. His quarters were almost luxurious, the exercise room very elaborate. The cup of liquid had a certain strangeness; perhaps a stronger coital stimulant.

He was finished and looking out of the window again when the main door opened and his first day female entered. Caste I. Very flattering. He had expected at most a II.

"Good morning, your Honor."

"Come here and let me see you."

He walked closer and posed in his regulation attire.

"Olan Nine, is it? You show promise." She dropped her outer garment.

"Beautiful."

"I suppose you say that to all of them."

"No. You have very good legs."

She smiled. "Come and sit with me."

He nodded, followed her to the proper couch. The routine seldom varied. She rested languidly at his left, her blue eyes inquisitive.

"Do you like your new quarters, the exercise facilities, the flicks?"

"Yes, and the view from the window is better."

"Oh, the fields and the forest make you think of freedom?"

"I couldn't survive out there."

"Not among those vicious, sterile castouts. It's a jungle."

He had been told that many times. Beyond the fifteen-foot-high wall of Location Fifteen was wilderness. Still, he often wondered about it. Maybe someday. . . .

The colored picture of Mother I, above the main doorway, was suddenly illuminated, soft polyphonic music filled the chamber.

"My name is Lotus. You may begin."

"That's an appealing name."

They moved closer together and she bit his ear lobe. He caressed her. Her hands were bold. They did not speak for several moments. He was responding. Soon there would be more conversation. It was all in the Correct Procedure Manual, he had just read the latest edition bearing the seal of approval from Mother XIX herself.

The flyleaf of the book carried some interesting figures, if true. The Controller of Location Fifteen had, during the past five years, produced seven normal male infants. One did not dispute statistics from sacred Motherheadquarters in Miami, but he had grave doubts about them. Questioning such statements was here-

sy.

He had been through Male Correction once, at age fifteen. Very unpleasant, demeaning. Poor food, too many females wandering about, no flicks or reading matter. His mistake had been to tell a Caste III programmist that she was unattractive. And then, at the crucial moment, he had failed to inseminate her.

"You do show much promise, Olan."

"I'm inspired by your voluptuous body."

A soft laugh. "I take good care of it. I believe you're enjoying yourself. Or does this always seem like a duty?"

"I do all I can for the future and the glory of Mother I."

"Well said, but we are not in Chapel. Mmmmm. Your success ratio is high, the Director is pleased."

He was given the figures each month, he had no way to doubt them. During the past year he had produced one hundred and ten pregnancies, one healthy male child, normal. Only five stillbirths. Seven abnormal males. What happened to them he was never told.

"You could go far, Olan. . . . Time for the bedchamber."

He nodded. Conform and agree. They rose and walked to a red door. The image of Mother I seemed to smile benignly. Lotus produced a key, fit it into the slot and turned. They entered a boudoir of extreme lavishness. The breeding cubicles of Section 2 paled by comparison.

Two young nubile Caste V females, appealingly adorned, smiled and bowed. The music here was softer, more titillating, mirrors graced the walls and ceiling, the floor covering was extremely resilient. Voluptuous colors. But, aside from the surroundings, procedures would evidently not be too novel. Two or three lower caste girls were invariably present to assist and witness. Each insemination was entered into the computers.

In the early days of the New Order, during the reign of Mother II, there had been extensive experiments with artificial impregnation. He had read of it in Motherhistory, volume 3. Somehow the male gametes had performed inadequately, whether from the intense radiation of wars that had almost wiped out the human race, or from other mysterious causes; the scientists could not tell. Imperfect genes kept recurring.

During the unsettled period before the rise of Mother I a great deal of accumulated learning had been lost: most of the glories of the twenty-first century, a world teeming with untold millions, had gone up in cobalt smoke and mushroom-shaped clouds. Mother One's thesis: Males were unfit to rule.

Those who had survived the Last Great War had lived in primitive bands wandering from place to place seeking food and shelter, discovering a few uncontaminated areas in what had once been the United States of America. Mother I had established the new order. Location Fifteen rested in a zone of fertile land that had once been a part of Oregon.

Olan 9 moved to a deep couch with a high back, Lotus sank lithely at his left in the usual manner. The girls began to dance, laughing and smiling. Their suggestive undulations, enhanced by the images in the mirrors, pleased the base centers of his senses.

"I looked at your file," Lotus said. "You did well during initiation."

"Youth. Some impulses are inborn."

She laughed, and was bold again. He began to exercise the liberties he was allowed. She responded excitedly.

Initiation. Age Twelve. He had been coached by two Caste VI females of moderate age and extreme skillfulness. Exercise and study, adequate food, a small swim pool, the ever present assistants. His performance marks had been high, the fertility

rate not as satisfactory as anticipated, but this had improved later, at the age of thirteen.

"You have beautiful hair and features, Lotus." Indeed, there were no traces of surgical repair. Even some Caste I females were not born perfect. She laughed and their mouths met. The assistants came forward and used long feathers. Pleasant, but still there was a dreadful sameness about everything. He often tried to imagine mating out in the fresh green woods, on the earth.

Presently all four moved to the bed, a very large one, extremely spongy. Smiling, Lotus positioned herself in the prescribed manner. He was becoming sufficiently stimulated. The young assistants watched and giggled.

Now.

He had never failed with higher caste persons. There had been no contact with other males since Boy-school, he had no idea concerning their success ratios. Location Fifteen was supposed to possess seven healthy, functioning males, six thousand breeders, twice that many sterile workers. Hail Mother I.

Time passed favorably. On her third response he was able to complete his part of the act. His sense of accomplishment and triumph soon faded into apathy. The usual reaction. A kind of revulsion he dared not voice.

He moved to the cleansing cubicle and Lotus remained on the bed. By lying quietly on her back for a long period afterward she increased the chances for conception. He had gained high marks in basic biology. He closed the door and looked at himself in the mirror. He wanted to vomit.

"How strong you are," said the tall helper who had arrived to clear away after his midday meal. His rest period had improved his frame of mind.

"Don't loiter," he said. Other

ears were listening or it was being taped. He moved to a comfortable chair and watched the flickscreen. The same old drivel. The short plump assistant helper glided in front of him and executed swift invitational gestures in flagrant violation of accepted decorum. Her left arm ended at the elbow; otherwise she appeared undeformed.

The taller helper came nearer and offered him a folded slip of paper. This sort of conduct was extremely dangerous. He did not care for another week in Confinement, and these two could be deported for such illegal conduct.

He made a face and shook his head. The tall one pointed at the window and her lips formed words. "We know a way to escape, we want you to join us."

Blasphemy. Reporting them would gain him nothing, though. There would be an investigation, always unpleasant. People did live beyond the walled cities, criminals and nonconformists, political extremists, workers past their prime.

Conditions out there were extremely primitive, food sources uncertain. He was sure he could not survive outside, he had no education or training for it. Any kind of such 'freedom' would be terribly costly. Still, it would be a real challenge, he could assert his masculinity....

The helpers smiled and postured in a way to indicate that he would be amply entertained. Mother! He shook his head again and walked to the window. The distant mountain was not visible, rain pelted down. He shivered.

A few moments later the girls were finished and he was alone again. The folded slip of paper rested on the center table. They had left it behind.

Angry with the impertinence of their act, he strode to the table, seized the note and unfolded it. The plan for escape was ridiculous, they could not even spell. He placed the



paper in his mouth, chewed until it was moist, then swallowed. Mothered young nitwits!

He could request different helpers, he might get them, but then there would be questioning. . . Now for an hour of exercise, a bath and a nap. After the evening meal another appointment. The dreary monotony of it made him wonder how long he could continue to breed. He was eighteen.

"How was he?" The question came from Location Fifteen Overseer.

Lotus smiled. "Slightly rebellious, as usual, but very proficient."

"Too bad we don't have more like him. Two a day may be overdoing it a bit. Still, his success ratio. . . ." She glanced at papers on her desk. "You may remove your name from his schedule for next month. We won't be certain for sixty days, you know the rules."

"Yes, your Excellency." Lotus rose to leave. "You should put yourself on his roster."

"I'm past the age of productivity," the Overseer said tartly.

"Just for pleasure alone. . . ?"

"You may leave."

The Overseer glanced through the file marked Olan 9. Her best stud by far. She leaned back in her chair and a smile touched her lips. She was permitted to read some of the ancient books salvaged from old libraries after the atomic holocaust of Armageddon in 2084. How strange things must have been, one man for one woman, family, caring for children. . . .

She sighed and looked at Olan's picture. A full head taller than the other six males in Location Fifteen. Quite muscular, almost a throwback. Pleasure indeed.

Her early teachings had to predominate, no emotional involvement with males, production came first and foremost. . . . although during her early twenties, in her most fertile

years, there had been that strong beautiful blond who had impregnated her on her very first assignment. . . .

She stopped daydreaming and placed the Olan 9 file in the male cabinet, locked it, returned to her desk and pressed a button on her communicator. Five minutes later two comely young entertainers came into the room. The overseer smiled. She needed diversion, something new and fresh. Exquisite!

"This is your first appointment?" Olan asked.

"Yes." The Caste II girl was quite young, possibly fourteen. Her two companions appeared about the same age. Another virgin. At times they seemed endless. All three were light haired, pretty and abundantly endowed. No signs of remake. The procedure would have no problems. This initiate was more appealing than most.

His new quarters and improved status meant very little, really. The same old repetition. He removed his tunic and loin covering. Giggles and stares. No pictures or text, this was the real thing. Thoughts of escape ran through his mind again. Impossible. There was no way out.

"Is something the matter?" The girl was seated on the couch, waiting.

"No, Lancet." He slid down at her right and began to fondle her. Her companions smiled and watched. The usual decorative clothing to be removed. The mating music started. The two assistants began to dance in front of the couch. The three seemed to know each other well, had probably gone to girlschool together.

"You're very fresh and enticing," he murmured. "Beautiful mams."

"Ohhhh." Her arms slipped around his neck. "I've heard much about you, Olan. You have a long waiting list."

"Delightful resilience."

She offered her small red lips. His mind began wandering, as usual.

He wished he could read some of the very ancient forbidden books, but at least he had heard some of the titles. A supervisor in Confinement had taken a liking to him, she had formerly worked in the library area, where only Caste I and higher status individuals were, permitted to take out volumes.

Although in a language strange to her, she had puzzled out some of the names. Fascinating. *Outline of Pre-Mother History, The Failure of Artificial Insemination, Life in the Twenty-first Century. . . .*

Lancet bit his lower lip, then her tongue shot into his mouth.

The room swayed, a huge crack opened in the ceiling. Lancet struggled to her feet, suddenly very pale. The floor buckled. A violent earth tremor. The room was plunged into darkness, the music ended on a sour note, the girls screamed. Holy Mother!

He groped his way to the central table and crouched beneath it. Building debris clattered on the table top, the floor heaved again, he heard distant shouts. A rush of cold damp outside air made him shiver. His head whirled, an awful nausea crawled up in his throat. . . .

Much later he was through a break in the wall of Location Fifteen and into the lush undergrowth beyond. He was wrapped in a blanket to protect himself against the night's coolness. Somehow he had escaped without serious bodily injury. The earth had stopped moving, his sickness began to diminish.

A new moon revealed the mass of twisted structures in Fifteen, outlines blurred by smoke. A gout of fire rose from the tallest ruptured building, sirens whined dismally. At least the rain had stopped.

He had realized the possibility of such a disaster in boyschool pre-training. Fire drills, instructions on how to find protection inside various buildings. Perhaps that early training had saved him.

"Hold!" came a harsh voice behind

him.

He turned his head cautiously, saw a middle-aged female in ragged clothing, a pointed spear held threateningly in her right hand. An outcast, surely. Even in the uncertain light he could see a deformity of her legs; they were too short.

"Don't hurt me," he said.

A few seconds of silence, punctuated by far-away cries and screams.

"A male," the woman said. Surprise, even astonishment. Then he heard a burst of profanity. Mother I was blasphemed in a manner that shocked his senses. "Come along, you pampered penis—we'll have some fun with you."

He struggled upright and winced. His left thigh had been bruised during the last tremor that had ruptured the wall of his cubicle. His captor pointed at an opening in the dense underbrush. He was prodded along a moonlit trail. His light sandals were little protection from the rough ground, he experienced another grab of nausea.

Finally they came into a clearing. He saw two rows of dilapidated dwellings, several had obviously been flattened by the earthquake. A few fires burned in open hearths in front of huts built of logs. Repulsive odors touched his nostrils. Several old and malformed females, wearing odd-looking furry garments, circled around him. The stench was terrible.

"One of their perfumed stallions!" the captor said triumphantly. She jerked the blanket open in front. "Observe how he's hung."

"Ai, ai, ai!"

"Their fucking city is ruined. Hail, hail!"

"We will organize food raids! Maybe we'll find another stud!"

"Fuck Mother!"

"Ai, ai, ai!"

His leg began to throb, he covered himself with the blanket. Outside at last. . . and it was even worse than he had ever imagined. A

tall, dominant figure wearing more sensible clothing pushed her way through the ring of uncouth deformities.

"Silence!"

There followed a rude inspection of his body. The blanket was jerked out of his grasp. He trembled, fear tightening his throat.

"Come along," the tall one commanded.

He was pushed into a smelly room with an earthen floor, the rough interior lit by tapers burning in two corners. The structure had somehow escaped the worst of the quake. A distorted older crone shambled from the place, leaving him alone with the apparent leader of this motley settlement of outcasts.

Seen in better light, she had no

visible bodily disfigurement. She wore a ragged cloth around her loins, odd-looking skin-like foot coverings. Her mams sagged, her face was average, showing lines of age. Disgusting.

She examined him again, murmuring obscenities. Then she stood back, smiling. Her teeth were stained. Disturbing animal aromas emanated from her body. The whole interior of the room was filthy. He felt very cold inside.

She pushed him toward a low couch. "Now, entertain me, stallion. It's been a very, very long time."

He had no alternative. She was quite muscular. Rotten 'mothered beast! She sank down on her back, she snatched her loin cloth away....

Desire

by Robert E. Howard

"Turn out the light." I raised a willing hand
And plunged the room into the silken, cool
Darkness in which the deeper passions rule;
Your tresses snared me with each moon-lit strand,
Your soft breasts sent warm raptures through my hand.
I felt your slim, fresh body close to mine,
The blood went racing through my veins like wine
And my desire was like a flaming brand.

The pulsing world was as a couch for us;
The brittle moon that flung her silver down
A jewel mystical and luminous
Enshrined and fashioned in our passion's crown;
The dusky, deep sapphirean sky above
A star-ensplendored canopy for love.

An Informal History of the Spicy Pulp

by Will Murray

It's ironic that during the so-called "Roaring Twenties," the pulp magazine industry remained fairly sedentary, dispensing for the most part millions of copies of traditional adventure, western, detective and love stories. But once the Depression laid its cold hand on the nation, the industry responded with experimental titles, new cross-genres and a willingness to sensationalize covers and stories to the point of luridness.

So it was that in the spring of 1934, the "Spicies" first appeared. It began with a single title, *Spicy Detective Stories*, dated April. Although the first issue, it was called Vol. 1, Number 2 on the contents page. The somewhat racy cover depicted a scene from Jon Le Baron's "The Love Nest Murder." The rest of the contents consisted of similar short stories by a variety of authors, both real and spurious:

"The Perfumed Clue" by Norman A. Daniels
"Impersonator" by Alvin Gray
"Redouble" by Jane Thomas
"Murder in the Chorus" by Leslie Skate
"The Kiss Thief" by John Bard
"The Shanghai Jester" by Robert Leslie Bellem
"Death Takes a Cruise" by Eric L. Schwartz
"Sauce for the Gander" by Byrne Horne

Of these names, only Norman A. Daniels and Robert Leslie Bellem are known to be the actual names of the writers. (Eric L. Schwartz, in fact, was a woman—Esther L. Schwartz.) Daniels wrote sporadically for the *Spicies*, but Bellem—who may also have been "Leslie Skate"—became the quintessential Spicy author. He

wrote for them continually until the company ceased to publish. He was so prolific that while his byline appeared often, scores if not hundreds of his stories appeared in these magazines under assorted pen- and house-

With the June 1934 *Spicy Detective Stories*, Bellem introduced his immortal Hollywood private detective, Dan Turner. He became the star of *Spicy Detective*, and later spun off into a magazine of his own. Turner racked up about 300 adventures over the years.

The company that published this first Spicy was initially called Modern Publications. Nominally based in Delaware for tax and possibly censorship reasons, their editorial offices were at Park Place in New York. Later, the company would be called, with blank-faced humor, Culture Publications, and its offices relocated to Lexington Avenue.

The people behind the *Spicies* are a shadowy group. A man named Frank Armer, who had been involved in a number of earlier pulp ventures as editor or publisher, was one of the big wheels behind the scenes. Also involved was Henry Donenfeld, and a host of his relatives. The Donenfeld family seems to have been the financial mainstay of the Culture line, and there are dark rumors circulating which say the Spicy titles were bankrolled by money earned through certain illicit activities during Prohibition. Supposedly, publishing pulps was a way to "launder" such money. In later years, the Donenfelds became responsible for the explosion of comic book heroes when they brought out *Superman* and *Batman*. The first Spicy editor was a man named Laurence Cadman.

It's hard to pinpoint the exact beginnings of the Armer/Donenfeld

publishing empire. Although *Spicy Detective Stories* was the first of the Spicy line, it was not the first magazine to use that buzzword for sex in its title. The King Publishing Company (later D. M. Publishing) started their *Spicy Stories* in December 1928. It featured straight sexy stories with no genre affiliations, and was no different from the other sexy magazines of the time, like *Pep* and *Venus*. It's not clear if the Culture group had anything to do with *Spicy Stories*. Only a few months before *Spicy Detective* started, the D. M. Publishing Company launched *Super-Detective Stories*, which Frank Armer edited. It was short-lived, and its link with the ture, if any, is problematic. (D. M., by the way, was another Delaware corporation.)

In any event, it was during the summer of 1934 that the Spicy explosion took place. Five companion titles were created, all cover-dated July. They were *Spicy Adventure Stories*, *Spicy Mystery Stories*, *Snappy Adventure Stories*, *Snappy Detective Stories* and *Snappy Mystery Stories*. If the Snappies differed from the Spicies to any noticeable degree, it is not evident fifty years later. In any case, they did not enjoy the long life visited upon the Spicies.

It might be difficult for a modern reader used to explicit sex in fiction of all types to appreciate the innovative nature of the Spicy line. But until Culture Publications, pulp fiction was largely asexual. Some pulps, like *Adventure*, took this to extremes. No females of any consequence graced its masculine pages. Love interest may have appeared in certain kinds of stories, but it was chaste stuff. Sex stories certainly existed in a number of magazines which were not exactly pulps, being thinner and of larger dimensions. But these, like the aforementioned *Pep* and others, were devoted to the misadventures of opposite sexes during their respective meeting rituals. It was boy-meets-

girl, boy-loses-girl, etc, with some mild titillation thrown in. Light-hearted stuff. Today, it could only be called "naughty". In fact, Culture's slant has been described as wilder than *Breezy Stories* yet milder than *Pep*.

Culture Publications took the harmless sex story and grafted it on to the red-blooded pulp genres of the day. *Spicy Detective Stories* featured hardboiled dicks—so to speak—involved in the seamier side of their profession. *Spicy Adventure Stories* took the sex story around the world to exotic locales where American—the heroes of the Spicies were always Americans—explorers and adventurers rescued half-nude white girls from various vicious ethnics and manfully, if seldom successfully, attempted to resist the charms of a luscious assortment of conniving foreign temptresses. *Spicy Mystery Stories* had a weird flavor. The tales revolved around ghostly or sinister manifestations, which were always explained rationally.

It was a genuine revolution which, while imitated, was never done with as much style and verve as Culture Publications managed to invest in their line.

The key to the Spicies was their clean, almost wholesome look—which was there even when the cover depicted a malignant dwarf shooting arrows at a scantily-clad girl tied to a giant bull's-eye. The man most responsible for this look was cover artist H. J. Ward, who painted his girls in attractive, girl-next-door strokes and gave them enough clothes to preserve their decency without minimizing their charm—or "charms," as the authors were wont to call their endowments. Accidentally or by design, the Spicy approach to female nudity had much the same appeal which made the early *Playboy* famous. Regardless of the pose or situation—and some were pretty wild—the Spicy Girl always looked wholesome, virginal, yet tantalizing.

Other artists, like H. Parkhurst,

also painted Spicy covers, but Ward was the most used, best remembered, and his style was clearly the Spicy house style. Interior art was often the same, but more daring. Actual nudity was shown, but with details left obscured. Parkhurst did a number of interior pieces as well, as did Paul H. H. Stone and Max Plaisted. While most artists didn't sign their work, one who did was Joseph Sokoli, whose sharp line drawings "spiced" most issues. (Later, he did abstract covers for the line, too.) Culture relied heavily on its artists, and even the shortest stories were heavily illustrated and set in large, very readable type.

The Spicy titles had a certain elegance that was almost, but not quite, at odds with its steamy subject matter. That may not have been evident in the Thirties, when the Legion of Decency was created (in the very same year the Spicies debuted!) to police movies, but today, when mainstream fiction is more explicit than the Culture editors ever dreamed of being, the content of most issues seems quaint, almost innocent.

Well, not quite. There was a certain amount of hot sex, sadism, illicit relationships, rape and questionable attitudes toward male/female co-existence. Yet when it came down to the raw facts, the Spicies blushed and turned away. Anatomical details eluded the authors. They enjoyed describing "swelling breasts" and "shapely thighs" and "creamy (or alabaster) skin," but never described nipples or breathed a word about female pubic hair and its secrets. Men were not described in sexual terms at all. And when the foreplay was over, the paragraph would melt into ellipses . . . and the reader's overheated imagination was on its own.

The sexual angles, overplayed on the covers and interior art, were not as big a part of the stories as the packaging promised. True, sex was a preoccupation of most of the casts, but often nudity alone was the result. One Spicy contributor,

Norman A. Daniels, claimed that whenever his other markets rejected a story, he just threw in some passing remarks about shapely feminine bodies and sent it to the appropriate Spicy title. Other writers report using this tactic, too.

The Spicy line, by 1936, included a new title, *Spicy Western Stories*. It was the last of the four main Spicy titles, yet it may have been one of the most logical ideas. Back in the Twenties, other publishers had successfully combined the love and western themes (the two best-selling pulp genres, by the way) with *Ranch Romances* and a host of very popular imitators.

But the Spicies were not all Culture-published. They inaugurated a related line under the Trojan Publishing Company name. The inspiration for the firm's name is open to speculation. Its first title was *Super Love Stories* in 1934. The Trojan arm of Culture Publications was its more legitimate expression. Trojan eschewed salaciousness and published mainstream pulps. They were sold from the same racks that featured other pulps. Whether or not the Spicies were sold on newsstands or under-the-counter depends on who you talk to—but actually this may have varied according to where they were sold. It's likely Trojan was incorporated as a separate entity to protect that line in case obscenity suits or censorship problems wiped out the Culture titles.

Trojan published a diverse group of magazines, including *The Lone Ranger* (based on the radio hero), *Romantic Detective*, and *Private Detective Stories*, where Robert Leslie Bellem's Dan Turner found himself a new home, and prospered. In 1940, Frank Armer revived his old *Super-Detective* title, this time with a Doc Savage-type hero named Jim Anthony leading each issue and, oddly enough, during the first year, with a number of science fiction stories in the back pages. Later, it became a straight detective magazine, and Jim Anthony was dropped.

Bellem and his friend W. T. Ballard wrote the Anthony stories under the John Grange house name. While sex was not a staple of the Trojans, what was euphemistically termed "girl interest" was. Attractive young women were prominently displayed on most Trojan covers, often with a great deal of attention focused on nyloned legs and the "damsel in distress" motif. But this was just window dressing.

The exact relationship between the Culture and Trojan groups is deliberately unclear. In 1938, self-appointed censors began to go after the more conspicuous sex pulps. The heat reached the Culture line, which began to cool the "heat" in its pages. The old tepid descriptions of foreplay were dropped, but the covers remained as racy as before. Culture did this reluctantly, but caved in when the Post Office threatened to remove its second-class mailing privileges, without which subscription copies could not be mailed. A year later, in 1939, it was announced that Culture Publications had "changed owners" and severed its relations with what was called "Frank Armer's New York group"—i.e., Trojan. But this may have been only a dodge, as later developments suggest. Coincidentally or not, D. M. Publishing (still publishing the old *Spicy Stories*) went out of business at this time.

In any case, Culture and Trojan continued publishing, sharing essentially the same stable of writers and artists, and a distinctly joint "house look." But who were the Spicy writers?

Well, many of them, like Norman A. Daniels, were regular pulp hacks who submitted to the Spicies when the spirit moved them. Culture paid only ½ to 1¢ per word, but was a wide open market with a reputation for paying quickly. The bolder of these writers wrote for the Spicies under their own names. E. Hoffmann Price was one of these brave souls.¹ John

A. Saxon and Ken Cooper (who may or may not have also written as Edgar L. Cooper) were two of Culture's regulars. Lars Anderson was almost the real name of Alan Ritner Anderson. Justin Case, one of the Spicy "house names," was recently revealed to be Hugh B. Cave—all by himself!

Many of these writers specialized in sex stories for various publishers, and their bylines never appeared outside this field. One, a woman named Thelma B. Ellis, wrote for Culture under her own name, a female pen name and two male pen names—all now forgotten.

Others, like Laurence Donovan, started off in the Spicies, went on to write Doc Savage, the Phantom, the Whisperer and other pulp heroes, then ended up back in the Spicies. George A. MacDonald was another Phantom author who worked for Trojan. Mystery writer Wyatt Blassingame did Spicies as William B. Rainey. W. T. Ballard used the names Clive Trent and Isaac Walton—but whether these were his exclusive bylines or merely ubiquitous house names is unclear. Of course, Robert E. Howard did his share of these stories as Sam Walser. Roger Torrey—a real author—did a lot of work for *Private Detective*. Science fiction scribes like Henry Kuttner, Ray Cummings and Ralph Milne Farley (really ex-senator Roger Sherman Hoar) are known contributors—even if their bylines are not.

But the king of them all was the mild-mannered bespectacled Robert Leslie Bellem. Bellem did not fear to sign his own name to his stories—but he did so many that other bylines came into play to an amazing degree.

Price's Spicy work was two stories Clark Ashton Smith gave him after Smith found them unsalable. In 1940, Price rewrote them for *Spicy Mystery*. The first, "House of the Monoceros," appeared in the February 1941 issue as "The Old Gods Eat," while the second story's fate is unknown. It was titled "Dawn of Discord." Naturally, they were greatly changed in the telling.

His favorite Spicy bylines were Elery Watson Calder, Harley L. Court, and Jerome Severs Perry; these were personal pen names. But he also wrote as Randolph Barr, Rex Daly, William Decatur, Walton Grey, John Grange, Paul Hanna, R. T. Maynard, Henry Phelps, Don Traver, Stan Warner, Hamilton Washburn, John Wayne (!) and Harcourt Weems. Exactly how many of these were house names may be beyond human rediscovery, but known ones include William Decatur, R. T. Maynard, and Max Neilson.

Bellem wrote in a glib, super-colloquial style, especially in his Dan Turner stories, where Turner, who narrated his own adventures, liked to describe female breasts by such code words as "pretty-pretty," "tiddly-winks," "bon-bons" and "whatchacall-ems." It may be a measure of the Spicy audience's mentality not only that Turner's adventures ran for years in *Spicy Detective* and *Private Detective*, but that in 1943, Culture-Trojan began reprinting the older stories in *Hollywood Detective*, usually three to an issue. The publisher was given as Arrow Publications, a new arm nominally headquartered in Springfield, Massachusetts.

The reason for creating Arrow Publications was that the Culture line was disbanded (ostensibly, at any rate) in 1942. Official pressure had continued against the Spicies. New York's mayor Fiorello La Guardia prevented the titles from being sold in Manhattan unless the covers were removed.

Culture realized that they'd run their course. They'd established hot titles in the big four pulp genres (only a *Spicy Science Fiction Stories* was overlooked—but then *Spicy Adventure* and *Spicy Mystery* did a lot of SF stories and covers in the early forties), diversified enough to cover their losses in any situation, and sales had slacked off. Frequently, older stories would be reprinted under new house bylines. So they finally killed off the Spicies.

But that wasn't the end, by any

means. At the beginning of 1943, Trojan started four new titles, *Speed Adventure*, *Speed Detective*, *Speed Mystery* and *Speed Western Stories*. Most were cover-dated January 1943. They weren't as racy as the Spicies, but in their own way they were "fast." Under the Arrow line, milder titles were established, including *Leading Love* and *Western Love*. Trojan came out with *Leading Western*, *Blazing Western* and *Amour*.

The Speed titles were edited by two men who had been with Trojan since the thirties, Wilton Matthews and Kenneth Hutchinson. They were responsible for the increasing use of reprints in the Spicy titles. Apparently, some of these Spicy stories were reprinted in the Speed titles, because in June of 1947 it was announced that Matthews and Hutchinson had been arrested and convicted of "check-juggling." They were sentenced to two to four years apiece. It came out that they had engineered a raked as sweet as any published in the pages of *Spicy Detective*. They would "purchase" stories, publish them as new and pocket the checks, when actually they were passing off reprints culled from the back pages of their own titles. Because the Spicies bought all rights, and because this canny duo always changed the bylines when they reprinted, the original authors had nothing to complain about even if they realized their stories had appeared again. (This is why some Robert E. Howard *Spicy Adventure* stories were reprinted under various house names.) Apparently one of these two masterminds pretended he wrote these "new" stories. In any event, they were caught and put away. As a result, the Arrow, Trojan and Speed lines were consolidated.

It would be poetic if the whole Culture/Trojan story had ended on such a deliciously sordid note, but it didn't. Many titles continued, and in 1948, a year after the "consolidation," Frank Armer officially stated he had only four active titles

¹An interesting sidelight to

left—Hollywood Detective, Private Detective, Fighting Western and Leading Western. The new editor was listed as Adolphe Barreaux. Supposedly the Donenfeld family divested themselves of their Spicy interests in the wake of their great comic book success.

Yet despite these claims, other titles continued. It seems that some of the Speed titles and *Super-Detective* continued until at least 1949 or 1950. Perhaps another outfit bought them out. Certainly by no later than 1951, if then, the whole operation had folded, its offices (wherever they were by then) closed, and its authors scattered to other pursuits (Bellem went to Hollywood to script *The Lone Ranger* and *Superman*). Even Dan Turner retired. The *Spicies* had seen their day in the sun—or was it their evening under the moon?

Although Culture Publications had taken a great deal of heat over the years, by 1950 standards they were already passe even in their most extreme form. The new and burgeoning paperback industry pushed the limits of propriety leagues beyond anything Armer envisioned; they dealt directly with themes like interracial love, homosexuality and other once-taboos, leaving the entire Culture/Trojan approach to sex stories in the dust and rendering the very term "spicy" antique.

The fact is that the *Spicies* were extremely tame. Where some of the more lurid imitators plunged head-first into sexual sadism combined with horror, Culture soft-pedalled such approaches. Competing titles like *Horror Stories* and *Uncanny Tales* regularly cover-featured scenes of indescribable (and sometimes inadvertently hilarious) torture with titles like "Daughters of Lusting Torment," "The Monster Wants More Than a Mate" and "The Claw Will Come to Caress Me." Culture covers were restrained by comparison, and their titles seldom had sexual connotations. Most of them, like "She from Beyond," "Ghosts in Her Eyes" and "Dance of

Damballa," could have appeared in almost any pulp magazine. This is not to whitewash the *Spicies*; their slant was unabashedly erotic, their purpose to titillate. It's just that they were so immature about it. When Armer started operations back in 1934, he instructed his writers that "Our stories border on the risqué, the situations may be compromising and passionate but there must be no actual 'consummation of love.'" Even the way he describes it today seems quaint and vaguely prudish.

In retrospect, one of the features carried by every Spicy seems to speak eloquently of the playful element that characterized them. Each title ran its own serialized comic strip. It started with "Sally the Sleuth," a four-page feature in which the blonde detective invariably found herself in distress and undress. This appeared in *Spicy Detective* and was signed, if memory serves, "Adolphe Barreaux." *Spicy Adventure* featured a female Flash Gordon named Diana Daw, ostensibly by Clayton Maxwell. *Spicy Mystery* tried "The Adventures of Olga Mesmer," the Girl with the X-Ray Eyes (creator Watt Dell explained that her strange powers, "dormant" during her childhood, "burst into light once she is aroused, and Olga embarks upon a remarkable career") but replaced her with another distaff spacegirl, Vera Ray, by the same writer. The sexual content of these strips was limited to the heroines stripping to their underwear when the going got rough. One gets the impression these strips were there for the edification of the pre-pubescent. And speaking of pre-pubescent types, adventurer Dan Turner got his own comic strip in *Hollywood Detective*. Naturally, Bellem did the writing.

The *Spicies* are long dead now. No vestige of the former pulp empire exists, and there are no records to reveal the secrets behind such frequent but mysterious Spicy bylines as Lew Merrill, Robert A. Garron, Morgan LaFay, C. A. M. Donne and Cliff Ferris.

Only the magazines remain, and not many of these. What does survive of those once-mighty print runs belongs in the domain of the serious pulp collector who may collect them for nostalgia, for the lush H. J. Ward

covers or even for their faintly risqué charm—but certainly not for their titillation value. The world outgrew the big, bad *Spicies* a long, long time ago.

Geometries

by Clark Ashton Smith

Your body and mine, upon the bed opposed,
presented changing forms and lines Euclidean.

Our heads' irregular and hairy spheres
pillowed in close conjunction, or describing
tangents, diagonals, parabolas,
in the unresting play of love.

Your tongue's obtuse triangle
parting the rounded curves of our four lips,
advancing vibrantly, and vibrantly retracting.

The spiral of my kisses
climbing from base to nipple gradually
about your full maternal breasts unspoiled,
whose hemispheres were flattened later
beneath the planes of low male breasts.

Caresses of our straight-drawn fingers
in tender parallels,
caresses
of fingers bent, half-angled and half-arc'd,
of concave palms enfolding knee or buttock
or breast or shoulder;
and intersections multi-angular
of arms and legs embracing.

And lastly
the lingam's rigid rectilinear line
bisecting the yoni's cloven, soft triangle.

All these were figures formed in time,
figures that changed and vanished,
and passed, perhaps, into eternity,
rejoining their Platonic absolutes.

And afterward
you went away, and I was left to ponder
on love's geometries of straight and curved.

Untitled Synopsis

by Robert E. Howard

John Gorman found himself in Samarkand, in possession of a letter which proved the guilt of Abdullah Khan, a Persian, and supposedly a European in disguise, who was located in Kabul as an engineering expert to embroil the Amir in a struggle with the English so as to weaken the empire's hold on India. It was thought that the Amir, if angered by the British, would turn to Russia for support. A radical party in Moscow were working to this purpose, but were not recognized officially.

Gorman had obtained possession of this letter by bribery. But while he sat in a native cafe, a dancing girl showed him a ring worn in the ear of the gypsy who had stolen the letter for him. Knowing she would not have it if the man were alive, he followed her into an inner room and learned that she too was a spy, the spy he had come there to meet and give the letter to. She told him she would lead them on a wild goose chase, while he took the letter to Herat. A man would meet him at a rest house on the road to Herat and take the letter.

Stepping from the house he was attacked by some strangers but fought them off, and without stopping for his luggage, made his way on foot to the depot, where he caught the train which ran to Merv every three days.

When he arrived at Merv he found he had several hours to wait before the train went on to Kushk. He went

to a prison-like hotel, and there encountered a girl who seemed out of place in such a joint. She flirted with him, and in the encounter managed to tip over the candle and plunge the place into darkness. In scurrying for the door she upset the chair on the back of which his coat hung. He wondered if she had stolen his wallet which was in his coat pocket, but found it intact.

He went on by train to Kushk, where he hired a horse and rode to the fort at Kara-Tappeh on the Afghan frontier. There he found that his passport had been stolen, and the commandant told him that a wire had come to hold a man of his description for a squad of soldiers who were coming to arrest him. He knew they were not soldiers, but members of the radical organization in disguise. He knocked out his guard and fled in the night.

He rode southward and at Chodchah Molai robat was held up by the girl he had seen in Merv. But he knocked the pistol out of her hand and raped her. Then he rode on to Herat, knowing they had captured the man who was to have met him at the rest house.

He had adventures on the way, and when he came into Herat was captured by a woman who was in love with Abdullah Khan. But the girl of Merv came to his rescue, and rescued him and the man who was to meet him at the rest house. She was in love with Gorman.